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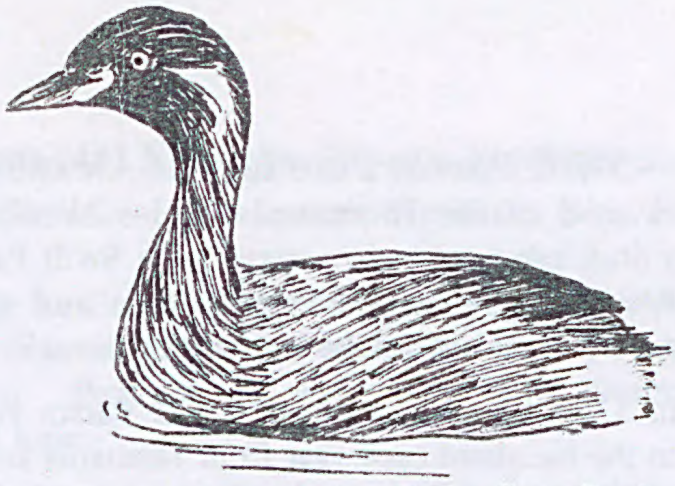

Australasian Grebe (breeding)

Melville Caves 12/6/04. Leader: Chris Morris,

The June excursion led by Chris Morris was to the Kooyoora State Park and the Melville Caves located between Rheola and Inglewood. Fourteen Club members braved the fairly cool conditions. The Park has some outstanding natural features with large areas of relatively untouched vegetation. The so-called caves, named after notorious bushranger "Captain Melville", comprise a large collection of granite tors piled on top of each other to produce prominent rocky outcrops. Excellent picnic and camping facilities are provided.

Before lunch we attempted to walk the Southern Loop which the signs informed us was only 2km return taking about one hour. After reaching the lookout point about half way, there was no sign of a loop so we backtracked to the picnic ground. After lunch, we climbed the fairly steep path leading up to the "caves". Ern positively sprinted up to the top whereas the rest of us took a little longer. Spectacular views were obtained from several locations. During the return walk we found the missing half of the Southern Loop after collecting a brochure with the park map from the campground.

A number of birds were sighted on the way but bird life in the park was not prolific. In spite of that, Rita collected the following list:
"Many Willy Wagtails (especially out the other side of Maldon), Red Wattlebirds, Galahs, four Kookaburras hurrying out for lunch, New Holland Honeyeaters, Magpies, a Grey Shrike-thrush, White-eared Honeyeaters and a beautiful view of a White-throated Treecreeper."

Vegetation was interesting as it included a number of plants not normally seen in the Castlemaine area of Central Victoria, such as Wallowa (*Acacia euthycarpa*), and Blakely's Red Gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*). Other wattles included Dean's Wattle (*A.. deanei*) and Varnish Wattle (*A.. verniciflua*). The Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) had reached an appreciable size in several locations and exhibited beautifully patterned bark.

Hans van Gemert

Swift Parrot Plan for Mt Alexander Shire 22/6/04.

Julie Kirkwood of the Threatened Species Network recently called a meeting to discuss a draft proposal and overlays for a Swift Parrot Habit Management Plan for the Mt Alexander Shire. **Interested people and groups are invited to read this draft plan critically and make comments about it.**

Less than 1300 breeding pairs of Swift Parrot remain in existence. These birds migrate to the mainland each year from Tasmania and Castlemaine is one of their key winter-habitats. Activities such as agricultural development, urban subdivision, forestry operations and firewood collection are threatening a number of known sites in the Mt Alexander shire – including a very important one where 80-100 bird have been present since late April 2004.

Additional local information is being sought in the form of formal records of sightings, identification of habitats and sites (both proven and suitable), locations with key ecological vegetation classes and identification of sites suitable for revegetation. *The aim is to be able to accurately predict whether or not a patch of bush/woodland is suitable Swift Parrot habitat that requires protection.*

Some suggestions put forward so far include -

- Encourage a basic strategy that moves away from low density housing to high density housing with access to aesthetic bush/woodland surroundings
- Observe the effect of the presence or absence of honeybees that compete for nectar and pollen
- Carry out more extensive and comprehensive surveys of the entire shire
- Sites need to be rated for significance in both good and bad seasons
- Habitat enhancement is complex and needs to be further researched – it may increase competition by attracting more aggressive honeyeaters
- Increase efforts to educate and work with landholders to protect trees.
- Planting in public forests is a risk when we do not know what should be planted. Allowing bushland time to regenerate itself is preferable to planting non indigenous species – weed removal may be more beneficial than revegetation.

People requiring training to be able to identify Swift Parrots should meet Debbie Worland on Sun. July 4 at 10am at the Castlemaine Golf Course Clubrooms (providing they are still there).

The ongoing visits of these rare and beautiful birds is an important asset for Castlemaine and must be protected. **Your input is strongly encouraged.** The value of the management plan and overlay will be greatly enhanced by the input of local community groups and other stakeholders with an interest in Swift Parrot conservation in the Shire.

Copies of the draft management plan can be obtained Ern Perkins (Ph. 54723124). Anyone wishing to contribute ideas or thoughts on this matter can do so by contacting Julie at jkirkwood@wwf.org.au preferably before July 12, 2004.

Geraldine Harris.

The Importance of Environmental Flows in Rivers, Streams and Wetlands. Dr. Paul Sinclair of Environment Victoria.

Paul Sinclair is a convincing advocate for Environment Victoria working to promote the importance of healthy rivers, sustainable energy and sustainable agriculture in a world threatened by global warming. Paul left his audience with a number of important messages when he spoke in June -

Everything is connected. Clean water, healthy rivers and strong communities are all connected. For too long we have taken water for granted. Now we must all learn to value and care for this precious resource.

Healthy rivers matter. Rivers are 'hotspots of bio-diversity"; contribute to health of our oceans; provide us with drinking water and recreation places to enjoy; are the foundation of our agriculture and our cities and they provide connections for some that go back generations and for Aboriginal Australians, many thousands of years. Yet only 25% of rivers in Victoria are in good condition and we have substantial ground water problems as well.

A healthy river requires:
...2/3 of its natural flow,
We take too much water from our rivers. Australia, despite being one of the driest continents on Earth, is the 2nd highest user of water per person on the planet.
If a 5lt bucket of water represented the world's water, only one tablespoon of that water is available fresh water - 96.5% is saltwater. Yet 75% of the Murray water is removed for agriculture and city water supplies.

...connection to its natural flood plain, estuary, and marine environment,
If we sever rivers from their flood plains, they will die. Flood plains are the rivers' "supermarkets". A healthy river has to get up out of its bed and onto the flood plain to access its food source. Yet in our rush to increase agricultural production and support development through the use of dams and weirs on our rivers, we have prevented the natural cycle of floods and droughts to occur and destroyed much of the native vegetation. Without these important fluctuation events, bird and animals are thrown into confusion. Water from upstream is being used for irrigation instead of performing the important task of diluting salinity in the lower section of the Murray. And without a sufficient flow of water the mouth of the river is choking and hundreds of River Red Gums are dying.

...native fish and plants,
The Murray River can no longer replenish its native fish populated forests. There are no native Catfish or Murray Crayfish left in the Murray River. The Murray Cod is now rare with populations scattered and fragmented. Aborigines understood that "the big ones put the little ones back in" but we have short memories and few are willing to reflect on past actions in the manner of fisherman, Bub Sebastian, who recalls,

"Now I get crook on myself... because no stream could stand the amount of fish (we took)".
If the flood plains struggle, the native fish struggle. Murray Cod traditionally move out onto the plains with the floods, coming back along familiar paths to the exact same snag to breed each year. As the rivers systems decline, fish species decline, and rivers become more similar until they all have a "carp" core.

...and good water quality.
Before irrigation the water maintained a healthy equilibrium. Rainfall was balanced by evaporation , transpiration and drainage. Irrigation dramatically upsets the balance of this process because it increased the amount of water in the watertables, causing them to rise. When ground water rises to only a metre or so beneath the surface, capillary action draws the water to the surface, where it evaporates, leaving behind the salt component of the water. This salt is toxic to grasses and other plants and stops them from drawing water from the soil and eventually kills them.
Before irrigation the Murray was the natural drain for all salt moving through the regional groundwater systems in the Murray Basin. It was a natural part of the water cycle. Removal of otherwise freshening waters from upstream has overtaxed this natural process.

Water is an emotional and political issue.
Some claim these changes are simply the price of progress. But Paul is concerned for his childrens' future. He is concerned that our River Red Gums are stressed; that dredging and pumping onto flood plains is not a sustainable solution; that trees split to the core from lack of occasional flooding in the Gunbower Forest are all too obvious signs that the environment is under severe stress.

He believes our environment defines us as people and that most people want a healthy Murray River and are willing to work together to achieve that. Irrigators like Howard Jones are now working to restore wetlands. By providing wet and dry phases, wetlands are being brought back to life.

What we can do
- Recover water for the environment by reducing the water we take by 15% - and back to 60% over 10 years
- Prevent cold water pollution as large amounts of cold water are released from the depths of the Hume Dam
- Provide snags for fish to breed
- Protect river bank vegetation from cattle grazing etc.
- Start thinking of a river as a river and its flood plain – a complete unit
- Demand that governments provide enough water to make rivers healthy
- Support calls for smarter use of water in the irrigation industry and cities
- Speak up for your river / become a river keeper
- Do your bit – save water in your household.

Issues raised during question time included dollar rewards for water conservation, paying for water collected in dams, collection of storm water, laws to control groundwater usage, rethinking crops such as rice and fruit and a dairy industry that consumes large amounts of water, the effects of compulsory rainwater tanks, possible sterilizing effects of oestrogen on fish as the result of use of recycled sewerage water, refitting duel flush toilets in older buildings and providing for water delivery and waste treatment near to or on site, replacing present systems that involve water delivery over long distances and transporting of waste vast distances for treatment.

There is certainly a lot of room for improvement when it comes to water use and the environment but it is clear from our evening with Paul Sinclair that this very political and emotional issue is also a very urgent one requiring a basic understanding that **ALL SYSTEMS ARE CONNECTED!**

Geraldine Harris

Ref: Sinclair, P. G. 2001. *The Murray – a river and its people*. Melbourne University Press, Carlton South.

Congratulations Dick Southcome OAM.

The Castlemaine FN Club congratulates Dick Southcome, of Geelong FN Club and President of SEANA, who received an OAM (Order of Australia) in the recent Queen's Birthday Awards. His award was for service to conservation and the environment, particularly in the Geelong area, and as a contributor to the establishment of the Australian Naturalists' Network.

Can you name the two familiar, yet rare and endangered species in this photo?

Bird Watching in Queensland – 25/6/04

Rita phoned in a report on a very rewarding Forest Walk at Yarraman in Queensland where she saw a female Paradise Riflebird, a beautiful gold and black Regent Bowerbird, and was followed by and finally sighted a pair of Eastern Whipbirds. At one spot they saw up to 60 Double-barred Finches, some Red Browed Firetails and lots of Superb Wrens all flocking together over a distance of about one kilometre.

In Brisbane, Rita and Doug saw Brahminy Kites while travelling on a City Cat(amaran) and at the Palms National Park near Cooyah in among 80-100ft palms and other very tall trees they sighted a Red-backed Wren.

Apart from some rain at Jerilderie in NSW, the countryside everywhere has been very dry.

Rita Mills

Observations

Brown-headed Honeayeater in Chris Morris's garden.

Dead Trees. Travelling up the Hume Highway on a recent trip to Canberra and Katoomba, George Broadway was concerned at the number of dead mature trees interspersed throughout trees along the way, right up to the Blue Mountains. He also noted that while none of the dead trees had Mistletoe on them, there was Mistletoe in many of the surviving trees.

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos in the Botanic Gardens, Canberra. It was suggested that the large numbers of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos in the Canberra gardens are a direct result of the pines being burnt in the Canberra fires. George Broadway.

... and closer to home. Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos are plentiful near Lancefield where there are pine forests close by. Robyn van Smeerdijk

Tortoise. Report of a very large tortoise crossing the road at a fast pace. George Broadway.

Echidna up close; and an Australasian Grebe and Brown Treecreeper. A clicking noise at our living room window at about 8pm proved to be the noise of echidna quills from large echidna searching along our window ledge for insects. He stayed for about half an hour and returned again later the same evening, providing us with a good close up view. A few days later an Australiasian Grebe in breeding colours was seen on the dam with two Brown Treecreepers nearby. Geraldine Harris

Wedge-tailed Eagle was seen soaring over Kangaroo Flat on June 24. Ern Perkins

A Flock of eight Flame Robins was seen near Fryerstown Cemetery on June 19. The flock included two flame-breasted males. Also in the paddock were Jacky Winters, Fuscous Honeyeaters, Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Magpies and a Willie Wagtail. It is the first time for many years that I have seen a flock of Flame Robins. Ern Perkins

Brown Goshawk. Natasha Harris found an adult Brown Goshawk dead on Lewis Road, Walmer.

Watch out for these natural events during July

(as suggested by Alan Reid in the Gould League book *Banksias and Bilbies*)

Birds: first calls of Fantailed Cuckoos, Jacky Winter Flycatchers return to nest sites, Magpies collecting nest materials, Masked Lapwings on eggs and attack as chicks hatch, Eastern Spinebills on Grevilleas, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos seeking new feeding ground, Little Ravens flockings, Scrub Wrens and Brown Thorn Bills building nests.

Red Box flowering on hills, Yellow Box seeding, Scented Sundews ,
Wattles in flower, Silver , Goldust, Spreading, and Blackwood,
Basket Fungi on clay patches, Pink Amanita fungus appears on moss
Frogs on wetlands. Tuans are active. How many of these can you find?

Correction.

For Common or Indian "myna" is the correct spelling, not "miner", as in Noisy or Bell Miner – perhaps because of its Indian origin. Does anyone know?

From the Business Meeting 24/6/04

Welcome to new members: Marion Lester and Sue McCallum

Mary Camilleri, a forest officer with **Forest Stewardship**, **DSE**, attended the meeting to talk with members about her work towards the Bendigo Forest Management Plan for State Forests around Bendigo. Mary is currently mapping the **threatened and endangered flora and fauna** in these forests and she invited comments and further input from the group to make the maps as accurate and comprehensive as possible. The accuracy of these lists is very important because they are looked on as the most respected record of such information in these areas. Anyone requiring forms to make a report or needing a comprehensive list of threatened and endangered species should contact Ern Perkins.

Richard Piesse, member of the **Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park Management Advisory Group**, reported that the Minister for Environment, John Thwaites, has announced the release of the recreational framework outlining how and where recreation activities are permitted in the new Box-Ironbark parks, reserves and State Forests.

Wendy French and **Maldon Landcare** are applying for more funding to fence off more of the **Nuggetty area**. Wendy has requested assistance from the Castlemaine FN to survey the area before and after fencing.

Extra Events for your Calendar

Sun. Jul. 25 National Tree Planting day.

Mon. Aug. 30 – Wed. Sep. 1. 2004. Club Visit to Chiltern National Park.
Stay at Chiltern Motel for three nights: Mon 30 and Tues 31 Aug, Wed 1 Sept
Cost: $190 per couple. Includes 3 continental breakfasts & 1 dinner (Wed).
Possible local guide for some outings. Contact Ern Perkins if you wish to attend.

Fri. Oct. 29 – Tue. Nov. 2. SEANA Campout at Wimpeys in the Little Desert.
Accomodation: $76 per person (with ensuite) or $56 per person (bunkroom)
Registration : $20 per person for whole or part of campout
Meals for campers available. Tours extra. (more details next month)
Deposit of $100 per person or full payment required with registration form.
Applications for enrolement available from Ern Perkins.

Weed Spotters Wanted Dean Bridgfoot, Landcare coordinator in the Mt.A. Shire, is calling for volunteers to map areas of Bridal Creeper. Phone Dean on 5471 1736 or 0427 003 052.

Articles Welcome - Articles, reports and observations can be left at Tonks Bros in Barkers St. or sent to Geraldine Harris, P.O.Box 184, Castlemaine, 3450,
Ph. 54742244, gedharris @castlemaine.net
Articles need to be submitted by the 4th Thursday of the month.
Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme - July, 2004.

General meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.
Excursions are usually on the Saturday following the general meeting, and leave promptly at the times stated from The Octopus, opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days. BYO afternoon and morning tea.
Business meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.
VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS.

Fri. Jul. 9. ***Kimberleys.*** Chris Morris. UCA Hall, 8pm.
Sat. Jul. 10. ***Native Street Trees.*** Leader: Ern Perkins, Ph 54723124. **Launch of the *Native Street Trees* leaflet. Driving, then walking. Leave the Octopus at 1.30 sharp.
Sat. Jul. 24. Roadside Cleanup. Meet near Tait's Carriages, Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine at 8.30am. Gloves, garbage bags and red safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear.
Sat. Jul. 31, Sun. Aug. 1. ***National Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Survey.*** Details at the July Meeting.
Fri. Aug. 13. ***Local Geology.*** Clive Willman. UCA Hall, 8pm.
Sat. Aug. 14. ***Jackass Flat Reserve – White Hills.*** Leader: Ern Perkins. Leave the Octopus at 1.30 sharp.
Thu. Aug. 26. ***Broom Pull.*** Meet at the Mary St/Froomes Rd. corner at 9am. Wear sturdy footwear, gloves, hat etc. Bring drinks and morning tea.
Fri. Sep. 10. ***Conserving Forest Wildlife.*** Richard Loyn, Arthur Rylah Institute. UCA Hall, 8pm.
Sat. Sep. 11. ***Mandurang – Greater Bendigo National Park.*** Leave the Octopus at 1.30 sharp.
Fri. Oct. 8. ***Macquarie Island and Penguins.*** Pauline Riley. UCA Hall, 8pm
Sat. Oct. 9. ***Humbolt – Taradale/Drummond Road.*** Leader: Ern Perkins, Ph 5472 3124 . Leave the Octopus at 1.30 sharp.

2004 Committee - Chris Morris (President) Ph. 9885 4221; Rita Mills (Vice President and Public Officer) Ph. 54724553; George Broadway (Secretary) Ph. 5472 2513; Hans van Gemert (Treasurer) Ph. 5472 1082; Geraldine Harris (Newsletter Ed.) Ph. 5474 2244; Ern Perkins Ph. 5472 3124; Richard Piesse; Athol Dorman and Nigel Harland.

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